

*The great Design of the Gospel
explained and applied :*

I N A

S E R M O N

On *Hebrews IV. 2.* the first part of the Verse,

Preached before the Presbytery of *Air*,
March 5th 1735,

Being the Presbyterial Sermon in Course.

By DAVID COOPER, M. D. *Minister at
Auchinleck.*



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T O

The RIGHT HONOURABLE,

WILLIAM

Earl of SUTHERLAND,

Lord STRATHNAVER, &c.

One of the Representatives of the Nobility of SCOTLAND in the Parliament of *Great Britain* ;

This SERMON is, with all Humility and Respect, dedicated by,

*His Lordship's most dutiful,
and most obedient Servant,*

DAVID COOPER,



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S E R M O N.

HEB. IV. 2. the first part of the Verse.

For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them.

THE Apostle having, in the preceeding Chapter, put these *Hebrews*, to whom he writes, in mind of the sad Effects of Unbelief and Disobedience upon their Forefathers the *Israelites*, proceeds in the Verse before my Text, to exhort them and all Christians, to guard against *That* which had been so remarkably fatal to others; *Let us therefore fear, lest a Promise being left us of entering into his Rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.* And this Exhortation he urges, in the Words of the Text, by a Motive taken from the Advantages which they enjoyed under the Gospel Dispensation;
For

2 *The great Design of the*
For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as un-
to them. Which Words are so clear and plain,
that it would be mere trifling to attempt any
thing like a critical Explication of them. I shall
only observe, that, according to the Original, they
run thus, *For we also are gospelized as well as they.*
But this not being so agreeable to the Genius of
our Language, our Translators have justly rendred
them as we read them, *For unto us was the Gospel*
preached, as well as unto them.

It will not, I hope, appear too curious to en-
quire, why the Apostle here represents the *Isra-*
elites, who lived under the Old Testament, as on
an equal footing with these *Hebrews*, to whom he
writes, who enjoyed the Advantages of the New
Testament Revelation; it being abundantly cer-
tain, that there was a very great Difference be-
tween the Condition of the one, and that of the
other. The *Jewish* Church could only discover
CHRIST at a great Distance, as about to come;
but these *Hebrews* had actually seen Him come in
the Flesh. The Gospel of CHRIST was much
obscured to *those*, by Types and Shadows, and le-
gal Rites; but *these* were admitted with open Face
to behold as in a Glass the Glory of the LORD.
This was manifestly the Case; and the Reason, I
think, why the Apostle does not expressly remind
them of it, was because the Thing itself was so
perfectly evident, that they could not be ignorant
of it. So that the Sense of the Words seems to be
this, *q. d.* "You cannot but know what happen-
ed to our Forefathers the *Israelites*; how they
were excluded the earthly *Canaan* for their Un-
belief and Disobedience, notwithstanding that
" God

“GOD was pleased to give them sufficient Means
“of knowing their Duty, by such a Dispensation
“of His Grace, as was fit for that State of the
“Church: And if the Abuse of the Goodness of
“GOD, under a more imperfect Revelation, had
“such terrible Effects; what may not we fear, if
“we abuse even a clearer and fuller Manifestation
“of the Gospel?”

The Doctrinal Proposition, which I shall, through
Divine Assistance, insist a little upon, is this,

*That the great Means appointed by GOD for
bringing Sinners to the Possession of the future Rest,
the heavenly Canaan, is the preaching of the Gospel
of Jesus Christ.*

The Truth of this Proposition is so clear from
the Apostle's way of reasoning here before us, and
indeed from all the Declarations of the New Te-
stament, that I need not insist upon the Proof of it.
I shall therefore in the Prosecution of it,

1. Enquire into the great Scope and Design of
the Gospel.
2. I shall consider the Character and Conduct of
those who were the first Preachers of it.
3. I shall shew the Suitableness of this Means to
the End proposed.
4. I shall draw some practical Inferences from
what shall be said.

I. First then I am briefly to enquire into the
great Scope and End of the Gospel: And this, in-
deed, is so plainly revealed, that whosoever reads,
even with the most ordinary Attention, the Scri-
ptures of the Old and New Testament, must needs
see that the Gospel of CHRIST is a most wise and
gracious

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gracious Design for restoring sinful Man to that Purity and Holiness, which he lost by his Apostacy from GOD. I shall therefore in discoursing a little upon this Head, endeavour 1. to give a short Representation of that *Holiness* and *Purity* which the Gospel requires; and 2. shall prove that this is really the great End and Design of the Gospel-Revelation.

1. Let us take a short View of the Nature of this Purity and Holiness which the Gospel requires: And this the Scripture, with a very remarkable Elegancy and Strength of Expression, represents as consisting in a Likeness and Conformity to the Divine Nature. It was the Glory and Happiness of Man in his primitive State, that he was created after the Image of GOD: And this Image of GOD, which was stamp'd upon him in his first Creation, did chiefly consist in an universal Conformity of all the Powers and Faculties of his rational Nature to the moral, Attributes and Perfections of his Creator. And as this was the Character of Man in his first Creation, so it is also, in some Degree, the Character of all those who are restored to the Favour of GOD by JESUS CHRIST. *They put on the new Man, which after GOD is created in Righteousness and true Holiness; that new Man which is renewed in Knowledge after the Image of him that created him. They become Partakers of a divine Nature: Partakers of the Holiness of GOD. As he who calls them is holy, so it is their constant Study and chief Endeavour, to be holy in all manner of Conversation. They become Followers, or (as it is in the Original) Imitators of GOD as dear Children. As they are commanded*
by

explained and applied.

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by their great Lord, so they endeavour in His Strength, to *be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect*; and to *purify themselves as he is pure* (a). But we may consider this Holiness and Purity, which the Gospel is intended to promote in us, as consisting more particularly in *right Dispositions of Mind*, and suitable Acts of *outward Behaviour*. This Gospel-Holiness, I say, is to be considered as including *right Dispositions of Mind*; because wherever true Religion prevails, it always exerts itself in a commanding Influence, not only upon the external Life, but also, and indeed chiefly, upon the inward Frame and Temper of the Soul. Hence it is that we are commanded to *be transformed, by the renewing of our Minds*. The Tenor of the new Covenant runs thus, *A new Heart will I give unto you, and a new Spirit will I put within you. I will put my Law in their inward Parts, and write it in their Hearts* (b). And the Necessity of this inward Renovation, this Purity of Heart, appears from this; that it is from within, out of the Heart, that all the Disorders and Irregularities of the Life do flow: *Out of the Heart proceed evil Thoughts, Adulteries, Fornications, Murders, Thefts, Covetousness, Wickedness, Deceit, Lasciviousness, an evil Eye, Blasphemies, Pride, Foolishness; all these Evils come from within* (c), as our Saviour has taught us, and is indeed evident from Experience. The Tree therefore must be made good, otherwise the Fruit will never be so. But though this in-

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ward

(a) Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10. 2 Pet. i. 4. Heb. xii. 10. 1 Pet. i. 15. Eph. v. 1. Matt. v. 48. 1 John iii. 3.

(b) Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Jer. xxxi. 33.

(c) Mark vii. 21, 22, 23.

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ward Purity of Heart is indeed the first part of Gospel-Holiness, yet it is not the whole of it. The Fountain, however pure, yet is only useful on account of the Streams that issue from it; the Excellency of the Tree, when made good, lyes chiefly in bearing good Fruit. In like manner this inward Principle of Holiness in the Mind, doth necessarily lead to, and will always shew itself by suitable Acts of Behaviour in the outward Conduct. We must love GOD with all our Heart, and our Neighbour as our selves; and this our Saviour makes the Sum and Substance of all Religion. But we are not to understand this, as if Religion in the whole Extent of it, was only an inward Habit of the Mind: The very Nature of this inward Principle, where it is in reality, always disposes a Man to becoming Acts of Behaviour in the general Course of his Practice and Conversation. This Matter is set in a very clear Light by the Apostle, who comprehends the whole of this Gospel-Holiness under these three Heads, of *living soberly, righteously and godly in this present World*. From which Passage, and indeed from the whole of Revelation, we may observe this great Truth, *viz.* That not only Piety and Devotion towards GOD, but likewise Justice and Equity towards Man, and Sobriety and Temperance in the Management of our selves, is an essential part of the Holiness of the Gospel. And as this is most strictly true in Fact, so it is the more to be taken notice of, because a great many are apt to imagine themselves holy and religious, if they are exact in attending the more stated and solemn Acts of Divine Worship, while they are habitually negli-

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gent as to the other Parts of true Holiness, viz. Justice and Sobriety. And not only the habitual Exercise of Justice and Equity, strictly so called, is absolutely necessary to denominate a Person truly holy; but if we would prove our selves effectually the *Elect of GOD, holy and beloved, we must put on Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another (a). Pure Religion and undefiled has always these necessary Ingredients in it, to visit the fatherless and the Widows in their Affliction, and to keep our selves unspotted from the World (b).*

Thus I have given some short Account of the Nature of this Purity and Holiness which the Gospel requires; which always supposes Faith in GOD, and Faith in the Lord JESUS CHRIST as the great Foundation of it, both as to the inward Dispositions of Mind, and the external Acts of Behaviour, of which it consists. I shall now sum up the whole of it, in these elegant Words of the Apostle, which ought always to be present to the Thoughts, and even engraven upon the Hearts, of all those who call themselves Christians; *The Wisdom that is from above, i. e. true Religion and Holiness, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy (c).* I proceed in the

2. Second place under this Head, to shew that this Purity and Holiness is indeed the great Aim and Design of the Gospel. And this appears

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both

(a) Coloff. iii. 12, 13.

(b) James i. 27.

(c) James iii. 17.

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both from the Nature of the Divine Perfections, and from the exprefs revealed Will of G o d.

1. First, This appears from the very Nature of the Divine Perfections. If the ultimate End of the Gospel be the Glory of G o d in the Salvation and Happiness of sinful Man, as it manifestly is; and if this Happiness can consist in nothing but the Enjoyment of G o d, who alone can be the chief Good of a reasonable Creature; it plainly follows, that there must be a certain Likeness and Conformity established between the rational Faculties of those who are to be made happy, and the great Object, in the Enjoyment of which this Happiness consists. Now the only Likeness here that can lay a Foundation for Happiness, must arise from a Communication of that Purity and Holiness, which is the special Glory and Excellency, and even the Happiness, of G o d Himself. It is easy to conceive this: The essential Evil of Sin, and that which makes it in its very Nature utterly irreconcilable to the Divine Perfections, lyes in its being a direct Opposition to the Holiness and Purity of the supreme Being. And therefore till this moral Defilement of Sin is once purged off, and the Soul becomes, in some measure, holy as G o d is holy; it is according to the very Reason of Things, as impossible for us to be happy, as it is to reconcile the two most opposite Extremes in the World; as absolutely impossible, as to make Darkness Light, and Light Darkness: And therefore the great End of the Gospel must be, to make us pure and holy, in order to our being happy.

2. But secondly, We may argue not only from the Nature, but also from the exprefs revealed Will

Will of G O D. All the Lines of that glorious Revelation, which G O D has vouchsafed us, center in this great Point, that *without Holiness no Man shall see the LORD*. If we extend our Views, and consider the whole Plan of Revelation, from its first Contrivance in the eternal Counsels, to its final Consummation in Heaven and Immortality, we shall find Holiness and Purity written, as it were in capital Letters, on every Part of it. *According as he hath chosen us in him before the Foundation of the World, that we should be holy and without blame before him in Love (a).* G O D hath from the Beginning chosen you to Salvation through Sanctification of the Spirit and Belief of the Truth (b). And when the Fulness of Time was come that the great Saviour should make His Entry into the World, the first Notice that is given of Him, is this, *Thou shalt call his Name JESUS, for he shall save his People from their Sins (c)*; i. e. from the Guilt and Dominion of Sin, that they may be conformed to his own Image in Holiness and Righteousness. One great Design of His dwelling amongst Men, was, that in His own Life and Conduct He might set before us a most perfect Pattern of Holiness; and by the Sweetness of His Conversation, might even charm us into the Imitation of it. And when He humbled Himself so far as to become obedient to the Death, the most ignominious and painful Death; *when he himself bore our Sins in his own Body on the Tree*; what was His great Intention in this? *That we being dead to Sin, should live unto Righteousness;*
and

(a) Eph. i. 4.

(b) 2 Theff. ii. 13.

(c) Matth. i. 21.

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and that by his Stripes we might be healed (a). He died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again (b). He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works (c). From which Words we clearly see both the End for which CHRIST died, and what should be the great Object of Christian Zeal, viz. Good Works; Works that have a real intrinsic Goodness and Worth in them, flowing from an inward Principle of Love to GOD, and done in Obedience to the eternal Laws of the Gospel; not little insignificant Opinions, and Matters of doubtful Disputation, an ignorant and wild Zeal for which has always done, and (alas!) continues still to do incredible Harm to the Interests of true Religion.

Nor is this the Language of the New Testament only, but it is the constant Aim of Moses and all the Prophets, under the Jewish Dispensation, to promote this substantial Religion, which consists in Purity of Heart and Holiness of Life, in fearing GOD, and keeping his Commandments; in ceasing to do Evil, and learning to do well: What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD? Who shall ascend into the Hill of the LORD? who shall stand in his holy Place? He that hath clean Hands, and a pure Heart (d). In a word, the universal

(a) 1 Pet. ii. 24.

(b) 2 Cor. v. 15.

(c) Tit. ii. 14.

(d) Eccl. xii. 13. Isa. i. 16, 17. Micah vi. 8. Psal. xxiv. 3, 4.

universal Voice of all Revelation proclaims aloud, that the great End for which this Gospel of God, which bringeth Salvation, hath appeared unto all Men, is this, *to teach us to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World* (a). And when the Character is drawn of those, upon whom this great Design is happily accomplished; how does the Description run? *We are his Workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good Works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them* (b).

The Truth of this Argument may also be inferred from the Nature of the Grace of Faith, the greatest of all the temporary Graces, I mean those whose Sphere of acting is confined within the present State of Mortality. By Faith we embrace CHRIST in the Gospel, and appropriate Him to our selves as our LORD and our GOD. But wherein lyes the Excellency of this Faith? Plainly in this, that it *purifies the Heart, and enables us to overcome the World. This is the Victory whereby we overcome the World, even our Faith* (c).

Thus it is demonstratively evident, that the great Design of the Gospel is to form us to Holiness, both in Heart, and in all manner of Conversation: I proceed now to the

II. Second general Head: Which is to consider a little the Character and Conduct of the Apostles, those first and best Preachers of this everlasting Gospel. And here I shall consider only that

(a) Tit. ii. 11.

(b) Eph. ii. 10.

(c) 1 John v. 4.

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that Part of their Character, in which they are *imitable*, and ought to be imitated by us all. Those extraordinary Powers and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, whereby they were enabled to speak Languages which they had never learned, and to work Miracles, were only adapted to the first State of the Church. Let us therefore consider them in the following Instances; 1. In their *Plainness* and *Simplicity*. 2. In their *Steadiness* and *Constancy* in spite of all Opposition. And 3. In their most *affectionate* Concern for the Success of their Labours.

1. Let us consider them in the *Plainness* and *Simplicity* of their Preaching; which was far from being with the artful and enticing Words of humane Wisdom. I don't mean that the Sense of every particular Passage of the Apostolic Writings lies level to the Capacity of every Reader; but this is as certain as any thing can be, that every Doctrine, every Duty, every Thing of the least Importance to Salvation, is delivered by them with so much Clearness and Perspicuity, that the meanest and slowest Genius is capable of apprehending it. The contrary Supposition would reflect Dishonour upon the great Author of our Religion; who gave it as an Evidence of the Truth of His Mission, that *to the poor the Gospel was preached*: To the poor; those who had not the Advantages of a learned Education, and consequently could not be supposed capable of pursuing abstract and intricate Deductions in their Searches after Truth. If the Scripture is given as a Rule of Life, and that to all Ranks of Persons; then certainly, the *great* and *principal* Things con-
tained

tained in it, must be such as all Men may understand. That it *must* be so, is evident from the Divine Perfections of perfect Wisdom, and perfect Goodness; and that it *is so in Fact*, is evident from a due Attention to the Scriptures themselves. It is no new Thing, indeed, to see those *who are unlearned, and unstable* at the same time, wrest and pervert the Scriptures to *their own Destruction*. But it is as certain as He who is Truth itself has told us, that *if any Man will do the Will of GOD, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of GOD (a)*. So that as the Scriptures are designed to make us wise unto Salvation, we may assure our selves, that all Things in them necessary to be believed and practised in order to Happiness, are delivered with all possible Plainness and Simplicity. The only Key for understanding all necessary Truths, is an honest well-disposed Heart; a Heart desirous above all Things both to *know* and to *do* the Will of the LORD. It must be confessed, that the Commentaries and Systems of some Scholastick Party-Writers, have raised a very thick Mist and Darkness around the sacred Oracles; so that if we have too great a Regard to these dark Lights, we shall be often in danger, either of not seeing at all, or not seeing with due Advantage, the Truth as it is in JESUS. To give but one Instance, that excellent Epistle to the *Romans*, particularly that part of it which treats of *Justification by Faith*, is generally looked upon as somewhat obscure; but when attentively considered, and compared with

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other Places of the New Testament, it will be found that the Obscurity is not so much in the Apostle's own reasoning, as in the metaphysical unintelligible Expositions of vain Men; who have here, and indeed frequently elsewhere, extremely *darkned Counsel by Words without Knowledge.*

2. Another Thing remarkable in the Conduct of the Apostles, was their Steadiness and Constancy in spite of all Opposition. They were instant in season and out of season. There never was a Set of Men, engaged in any Undertaking, so surrounded with Discouragements on all hands, as the Apostles were, while they travelled from place to place preaching the Gospel. Every thing that could appear shocking or terrible to humane Nature was thrown in their way; the Power of Princes, the Counsels of Politicians, and all the Sophistry and Wit of Philosophers, was employed against them: *But none of these things moved them, neither counted they their Lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their Course with Joy, and the Ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of GOD.* When Persecution forced them to leave one Place, new Troubles soon sprung up to them in another: But the Effect of all this was only to whet the Edge of their Zeal and Diligence in the Service of their great Master, and to animate their Resolutions of *enduring Hardships as good Soldiers of Jesus Christ.*

3. The Third and last Thing I shall take notice of in the Conduct of the Apostles, as Ministers of the Gospel, is their *most affectionate Concern* for the Success of their Labours. *How afraid*

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were they, lest they should have bestowed their Labour in vain? How constant and fervent in Prayer, that the Gospel might run and be glorified? that they might be honoured to be Instruments of converting Men, not only to the Profession, but especially to the Power and Practice of Religion: That all that named the Name of Christ might depart from Iniquity; being filled with the Knowledge of his Will, in all Wisdom and spiritual Understanding; that they might walk worthy of the LORD unto all pleasing; being fruitful in every good Work, and increasing in the Knowledge of GOD. Hence it is that they are represented as *travailing in birth* till Christ should be formed in their Hearers; that they might stand perfect and compleat in all the Will of GOD. What a noble Pattern for our Imitation! What pity is it we should not study to copy after these great Originals! Let us therefore go and do likewise,

III. The Third Thing I proposed to speak to, was the *Suitableness of this Means*, the preaching of the Gospel, to the End proposed, viz. the making us holy here, and happy hereafter: And this will appear, if we consider,

1. The Nature of the Doctrine preached; a Doctrine in every respect according to Godliness; which gives the most rational and the most amiable Discoveries of the Divine Perfections; representing the supreme Being, as essentially possessed of all that can make Him the Object both of our Fear and Love; as infinitely wise, powerful, just, good and faithful: Which are all Excellencies, that the very first Notion of a God must neces-

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fairly suggest as inseparable from Him. The first Principles of all Religion, that *GOD is*; that *He made the Heavens and the Earth, the Sea and all Things contained therein*; and that as He made, so He preserves and over-rules all Things by His all-wise Providence; that as He is, so He is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him; and hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness. These first Principles, I say, are such as cannot but recommend themselves to the Approbation of all considerate Men, as being perfectly agreeable to the unbyassed Reflexions of the rational Mind. How would the famous *Cicero* have displayed his Oratory, had the great Truths of Religion been set before him, in the same advantageous Light, as they are before us, by the Revelation of the Gospel? How would his great Mind, after all his laborious Enquiries after Truth, have leaped for Joy, to hear an Apostle *Paul* speaking forth the Words of Truth and Soberness? He must needs, methinks, have gone still further than *Agrippa*, and said, not almost, but even altogether thou perswadeest me to be a Christian. So charming, and even constraining is the Force of Truth, when set before an ingenuous Mind in its native Beauty. Hence it is that we find the Apostles, in their Reasonings with the Heathen World, inferring from these first Principles, the Reasonableness of their turning from their Idol-Vanities to the living God; appealing, as it were, to their own Minds for the Truth of what they delivered to them (a).

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(a) Acts xiv. 15. and xvii. 22. — 32.

As to the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity, the more thoroughly they are examined, the more they will appear to be worthy of GOD, as tending to display His own Perfections, and to exalt and perfect the rational Nature of Man. And it is remarkable that the Apostles, in all their Discourses both with the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, take it for granted, that when these Doctrines are clearly explained, Reason has nothing to object against them, but must, on the contrary, approve of them as just and wise. It is true, *Christ crucified was to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness*: But this was owing entirely to their own Pride, Prejudices and Mistakes, which hindered them from attending to the Evidence of Things. It must be owned, there are Depths here, which the Weakness of our Faculties cannot now fathom; but nothing, that upon a just Examination can be said to be shocking to them.

2. Another Thing that renders the Gospel, and the preaching of it, a most *suitable Means* for the End proposed, is the Motives and Arguments it makes use of, to persuade Men to abandon Vice, and become truly religious. What can be more effectual in a way of Motive, to rouse even the most stupid Creature to Thoughtfulness and Consideration, than to assure him, that *the Wrath of GOD is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness*? What can more powerfully persuade to a patient Continuance in Well-doing, and to seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, than the Assurance of eternal Life in the World to come? What can so effectually support under all
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the Troubles of Life, as a Declaration from **GOD** Himself, that *all Things shall work together for good to them that love Him?* And that though Clouds and Darknefs are round about him, yet *Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation of his Throne.* And lest we should despond and faint in our Minds, from the Apprehensions of our own Insufficiency, we are encouraged to make our Applications, even with Boldness and Freedom, to a *Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy and find Grace to help in time of Need.* 'Tis but asking, and we shall find; seeking, and we shall receive; knocking, and it shall be opened to us. Our heavenly Father is represented in this Gospel, as more ready to give His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him, than the most affectionate Parent on Earth is to give Bread to his Children. And are not such Motives and Encouragements as these, not only suitable, but even capable of filling the Mind with Joy unspeakable?

But the great Motive of the Gospel, and that which is peculiar to the Christian Institution, is that astonishing Event of the Death and Sufferings of the Son of **GOD**; which though it was treated as a Subject of Ridicule by the ancient *Jews and Greeks*, and is still so by too many, is yet to all that are called, *the Power of GOD, and the Wisdom of GOD.* Herein is to be seen, to the eternal Wonder both of Angels and Men, a most harmonious Concurrence of all the Divine Perfections; Justice is satisfied, the Honour of the sacred Law is vindicated, and the Goodness, Love and tender Compassions, both of the Father and of the Son, exhibited to us, in a way that no Words can express,

express, no Thoughts conceive. What a Variety therefore of Motives is here, all representing to us, as in the clearest Glass, the infinite Evil and Deformity of Sin, and the inexpressible Amiability, Excellency and Reasonableness of true Holiness.

3. Another Instance of the Suitableness of the Gospel-Dispensation, as a Means to the End proposed, we have in the Manner in which it was at first propagated, and in which it ever can be propagated, *viz.* by the *gentle Methods of Reason and Persuasion*. Force and Violence, Hardships and Severities have no place here, as being altogether improper for advancing the Interests of a Kingdom which is not of this World. These, indeed, have always been the mighty Engines that the Princes of the Earth have made use of, in extending their Dominions, and enslaving their Neighbours: But our great Lord, the King of the Church, having a nobler Conquest in View, hath appointed other Methods for accomplishing His Designs. Let *Mahomet, Spain and Italy* propagate their Absurdities by Force of Arms, Torture and Inquisition; but *the Man of G O D must not strive, but be gentle unto all Men, apt to teach, patient*. It seems extremely natural to the Mind of Man, in Matters of Religion, to be harsh and severe, cruel and imposing. The very Disciples of our Lord were once disposed to propagate His Religion by Fire and Destruction (a); but it was before they knew either their own Spirits, or the true Spirit of the Gospel. When they come afterwards to be bet-

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(a) Luke ix. 54.

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ter instructed in the Nature of their Master's Institutions, there is nothing to be seen in their Manner and Conduct, but Gentleness and Meekness, and every thing that is worthy of the Prince of Peace. They were indefatigable in their Endeavours to draw the World to CHRIST; but it was only *with the Cords of Love, and the Bands of a Man*. And as this was the Method of the Apostles, so we may assure our selves, it is the only Method that GOD will ever bless in making the Gospel of CHRIST the Power of GOD unto Salvation. The Suitableness of which is evident to all who consider the Nature of Religion itself, and the Nature of Man as a reasonable Creature.

Let me add, as a Conclusion to this Head, that the Religion of the Gospel must needs have appeared a most *reasonable Service*, to those of the Heathens, who, even by the unassisted Light of Reason (as far as we know) could talk so justly concerning the Nature of true Piety and Virtue. One cannot but admire the many beautiful Descriptions of this kind that are to be found in the Writings of the Heathen Moralists; but I shall beg Leave to mention only one, and I do it with the more Confidence from this Place, that I have the Authority of an Apostle for citing a Heathen Poet,

*Compositum ius fasque animi, sanctosque recessus
Mentis, Et incultum generoso pectus honesto;
Hec cedo, ut admoveam templis, Et farre litabo.*

Here we have not only a most elegant, but also a most just Account of that Purity of Mind, which the

the Gospel is intended to promote amongst Men. And hence, I think, may be well inferred, that to sober unprejudiced Men the Gospel-Scheme must certainly appear a most suitable Means for reforming the World and promoting Virtue. It remains now that I proceed in the

IV. Fourth and last place, to draw some Inferences from what has been said, by way of Application. And

I. First, from what has been said concerning the Nature and Design of the Gospel, we may clearly see what ought to be the chief Aim of Ministers in all their Sermons and Discourses; namely, to promote That, which is manifestly the Design of all Revelation, Purity of Heart and Holiness of Life. While we explain to People the several Doctrines of Religion, we must let them see, that it is not enough that they have right Sentiments of them as to Theory and Speculation, but that *those Things which they know, happy are they, only if they do them*: That the Knowledge of the Way will signify nothing to them but to aggravate their Guilt, unless they walk in it. All the Doctrines of the Gospel have a direct Tendency to display the Glory of the Wisdom, Power, Goodness and Mercy of GOD in CHRIST, by pulling down every *strong Hold* of Sin, casting down every carnal and corrupt *Imagination*, and bringing into *Captivity every Thought unto the Obedience of Christ*. And then only can we be said to preach CHRIST, when we so explain, and so apply the Truths of Religion, that our Hearers may be convinced, that all the Value and Efficacy of

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them depends upon the vital Influence which they have upon our Hearts and Lives. While we open to them the Nature of Faith, that fundamental Grace of the Gospel, we must be careful to let them see the necessary Influence it must have both upon the Dispositions of their Minds, and the whole Course of their practical Life and Conduct; and that without Works of universal Obedience to the Precepts of the Gospel, it is altogether dead. When we tell them (as we must) that they cannot be saved by their own Righteousness, we must also tell them as plainly, that they can never be saved without it; that the Righteousness of CHRIST is never imputed, but when it makes those to whom it is imputed, pure and holy; and that he, and he only, *who doth Righteousness is righteous, even as Christ is righteous.* (a). And here we cannot but observe, that there is no part of Religion that the Holy Spirit in Scripture speaks more honourably and emphatically of, than *Good Works*. We must be zealous of good Works; *We are his Workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good Works*; *By Works Faith is made perfect*: *This is a faithful Saying, and these Things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in GOD, might be careful to maintain good Works.* Thus speaks the Holy Spirit Himself concerning Good Works (b); as on purpose to condemn the Ignorance and Profaneness of those who dare presume to speak contemptuously of them. It is doing the greatest Dishonour that can possibly be done

(a) 1 John iii. 7.

(b) Tit. ii. 14. Eph. ii. 10. James ii. 22. Tit. iii. 8.

done to CHRIST and His holy Religion, under a Pretence of *preaching the Gospel*, to entertain People with little fanciful Notions that have really no Meaning at all, and can serve to no purpose but only to amuse the Imaginations of the Ignorant. Strange Delusion, that this should pass for *Gospel-Preaching*! Sure, if this be Divinity, it may be justly stiled *Modern*: For in all the Discourses of *Moses* and the Prophets, of CHRIST and His Apostles, there is not the least Footstep of it to be found.

2. We may hence learn the true Rule of judging concerning *Orthodox* and *Heterodox* Doctrines. All the Doctrines of the Gospel have a plain Tendency to promote substantial Goodness, by purifying the Heart and reforming the Life; to make us better Men, both as to our inward Dispositions and our outward Actions: And whatsoever has a contrary Tendency, is manifestly not of GOD; *such Wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.* The true Notion of Heresy (when the Word is used in a bad Sense; for in many Places of Scripture it is of an indifferent Signification: But the true Notion of it, I say, when used in a bad Sense) may be learned from the Character which the Apostle gives of a Heretick, when he expressly tells us, that he is *condemned of himself* (a); i. e. he is one who maintains, and endeavours to propagate, some Notion or Practice so vile in itself, that it is not only contrary to all the Dictates of Revelation, but shocking to the very natural Reflexions of sober Reason. And this

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is perfectly the Character of all the Hereticks mentioned in Scripture; they were Men who, for their own private sensual Views, propagated such Impurities and Abominations, as their own Minds must necessarily have condemned. They were not Men who only erred in Judgment, (for in this Sense all mere Men since the Fall not only *may* but *must* err) but they were *ungodly Men, turning the Grace of GOD into Lasciviousness*, and therefore it is no wonder, if *they denied the only LORD GOD, and our Lord Jesus Christ*. They were Men of *lascivious and pernicious Ways, on whose Account the way of Truth was evil spoken of*. They *taught Things which they ought not, for filthy Lucre sake*, to gratify their covetous and impure Desires: And being thus sensual and designing, 'tis no wonder if they are represented as *creeping into Houses, and leading captive silly Women, &c.* But all the Doctrines of the Gospel, as I have already observed, are in every respect according to Godliness. As they descend from above, so they have visible Marks of their heavenly Original stamp't upon them. As they come from GOD, so they lead to Him; They are pure in their Nature, and worthy of GOD; and pure in their Tendency and Effects, as being perfectly calculated to recover fallen Man, by making him Partaker of a Divine Nature. And thus we may easily judge between the Doctrines that are of GOD, and those that are of vain selfish Men.

3. We may hence learn the only true way of doing Honour to the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST; and that is, by having our Conversation in all Things such as becomes it. We may dispute a-
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bout it; and even persecute and destroy one another, out of Zeal for the Truths of it: But all this will signify nothing, while the Tempers and Lives of those who profess it, are so unsuitable to it, and so unworthy of it. There never, I believe, was an Age, since the Days of Inspiration, in which the Truth of our holy Religion was more solidly established by strength of Reason, than this we live in. But alas! we have, in a great measure, lost the best of all Arguments; I mean, a Christian Life and Practice. The primitive Christians could say, *We don't speak great Things, but live great Things*: But we have sadly inverted this; we talk high, and live low. It is to be hoped, that there are still a few Names amongst us that have not defiled their Garments: But where is that Church, where is that Body of Christians, to whose Life and Conduct an Appeal can be made for the Truth of our Religion? I have somewhere read, that when the Popish Missionaries went first to *China*, they found the Inhabitants of the Country so regular in their Morals, that it was thought expedient to conceal from them the Vices of Christians, lest the Knowledge of them should have hindered the Conversion of those Heathens. A Fact, if true, that carries a very severe Reflection with it. There is an irresistible Force in what is seen: *While we profess to know GOD*, yet if it appear by our Lives, that *in Works we deny him*; others must clearly see, that we are not, that we cannot be, what we pretend. And while we live so much beneath our Character, we not only deceive our selves, but also destroy others, by making CHRIST
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and His Religion contemptible to them. May therefore all that name the Name of CHRIST depart from Iniquity; and live so, that we may bring back that golden Age of Religion, when the Apologists for Christianity durst openly in the Face of the World appeal to the Lives of its Professors, as a convincing Evidence of its Truth and Excellency. This only can restore the ancient Credit of the Gospel of CHRIST, and make the Light of it shine with Success before others, that they, *seeing our good Works, may glorify our Father who is in Heaven.*

4 We may hence also learn, that the Religion of the Gospel is every way friendly and beneficial to civil Society. One essential Part of the Holiness that the Gospel requires, is to *love our Neighbour as our selves*; not only to behave towards him according to the strict Maxims of Justice and Equity, but to *do to all Men what we would that they should do to us.* Though by the Laws of the Gospel, we are in a special Manner to do Good to those who are of the Household of Faith, yet we are also expressly commanded to *do good to all*; to love our very Enemies, to *bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, &c.* and by this substantial Argument to prove our selves the Children of our Father who is in Heaven; *who maketh his Sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth Rain on the just and on the unjust.* And did this excellent Spirit, which is the true Spirit of the Gospel, rule in the Hearts and Lives of Men; what an Influence would it have upon Neighbourhood? How would it sweeten Conversation, and spread an universal Happiness

ness over all Societies and Communities of Men? From whence come Wars, and Fightings, and Brawlings amongst us? come they not hence, even of our Lusts that war in our Members? But was the Gospel entertained by us in its genuine Nature, and full Extent; did those social Virtues and Graces, which it every where enjoins, adorn our Conversations; how would they banish from amongst us, not only the more furious Outrages of open Wickedness and Injustice, but every thing that is in the least uneasy or disagreeable in Society? The holy and peaceful Religion of the meek Jesus would so far improve the social Conduct of Men, by subduing all the irregular and hurtful Sallies of Passion, as to make *this* Life an Emblem of *that* which is to come. It would even fill our present World, in a great Degree (as this Gospel-Holiness, when raised to its highest Perfection, will fill the new Heavens, and the new Earth) with perfect Love, and perfect Peace.

g. Fifthly and lastly; Is Purity of Heart and Life, universal Holiness, the great Scope and Design of the Gospel? Then we may easily judge wherein the Nature of the future Rest or Happiness will consist, viz. in as perfect a Conformity to the Divine Perfections in Holiness and Purity, as Creatures of such a Rank are capable of. This is most agreeable to the Nature of Things, and may be made out by abstract reasoning; but the Scripture itself has set the Matter in a most easy Light. *Wisdom's Ways, i. e. the Ways of true Religion and Holiness are, even in the present State, Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace.* The Kingdom of GOD, even here below,

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is Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost. But all this Peace, and Pleasure, and Joy, flows naturally from Holiness itself, as its genuine Source and Spring; the Exercise of every particular Grace having a real Pleasure attending it, which is even essential to it, and as inseparable from it as Light is from the Sun, or Heat from Fire. Therefore, when all the Shadows of Sin and Imperfection are removed, and *that which is perfect is come*; when the Holy Ghost shall have put the last Hand to the Work of Sanctification; it is easy to conceive, that this Pleasure and Joy must necessarily rise in proportion: So that what is now but as a Drop, will then enlarge itself into a River, and form that *River, the Streams whereof will for ever make glad the City of GOD, the holy Place of the Tabernacles of the most High.* And thus it is plain, that the future Rest, the Happiness of Heaven, is Holiness brought to its utmost Perfection and Maturity. — (And here, if I had not already encroached too far upon the Reverend Presbytery's Time, it might not perhaps be an impertinent Digression, to say something to the Question, How far we are to be animated in the Pursuit of Holiness and Virtue by the Prospect of a Reward? But all that I shall say to it at present is this, that the Question itself seems to go upon a wrong Supposition, viz. that Holiness and Happiness, Virtue and its Reward, are two distinct Things; whereas they ought rather to be considered as being in reality perfectly one and the same. The Scripture, indeed, in a figurative Stile, represents the future Happiness under a great variety of Images; but these are all to be under-

understood in a way of Accommodation to our present Weakness, the more forcibly to strike our Minds, and engage our Attention. — But, to go on) What is it that will make the Church so glorious, when CHRIST shall finally *present it to himself*, but this, that *it shall have neither Spot nor Wrinkle, nor any such thing*, but shall be *perfectly holy and without blemish*. So far, I think, we may reason with Clearness and Certainty concerning the Nature of the future Rest: I say, concerning the *Nature* of it; for as to its Degree and Measure, we can at this Distance attempt no Description. Words must fail us here, because Ideas are wanting. It is, in this respect, like the Love of CHRIST that purchased it; its Height and Depth, Breadth and Length do far surpass all our present Knowledge and Conceptions. Our Faculties here are not large enough to take in the immense Thought! Eye has not seen, Ear has not yet heard, nor has it so much as entered into the Heart of Man to conceive, the Things that God has prepared for them that love Him.

May we therefore be *ever looking for that blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great GOD, even our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

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